

## Message Text

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PAGE 01 LISBON 00760 081348Z

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC 1678

INFO AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS

USMISSION EC BRUSSELS

USMISSION GENEVA

AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMEMBASSY MADRID

AMEMBASSY PARIS

C O N F I D E N T I A L LISBON 760

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: ELAB, PINT, PO

SUBJ: MINISTRY OF LABOR INTERVENES IN CHEMICAL UNION DISPUTE

SUMMARY: COMMUNIST PARTY DISSIDENTS ARE ATTEMPTING TAKEOVER OF CHEMICAL WORKERS UNION. MINISTRY OF LABOR RULES NEW ELECTIONS MUST BE HELD. OUTCOME WILL BE SIGNIFICANT TEST OF COMMUNIST PARTY STRENGTH IN LABOR. END SUMMARY.

1. CHEMICAL WORKERS UNION IS ONE OF FEW PORTUGUESE UNIONS WITH LEADERSHIP CRITICAL OF INTERSINDICAL AND ACTIVELY OPPOSED TO UNITARY LABOR LAW. CHEMICAL WORKERS PRESIDENT, CARLOS GUINET, IS ALSO A LEADER OF ALIANCA OPERARIA-CAMPONESA (AOC), A LEFTIST SPLINTER GROUP OF VAGUELY DEFINED, ANTI-SOVIET IDEOLOGY. IN AN ADMITTED "TACTICAL ALIGNMENT" AOC AND SOCIALIST WON LEADERSHIP OF CHEMICAL WORKERS UNION IN 1973 ELECTIONS.

2. ON FEBRUARY 2 AN ORGANIZED FACTION OF APPROXIMATELY 300 INDIVIDUALS IDENTIFIED WITH COMMUNIST PARTY DISRUPTED A GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE CHEMICAL WORKERS UNION. OUTNUMBERED AOC/SOCIALIST

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PAGE 02 LISBON 00760 081348Z

LEADERSHIP DECLARED MEETING CLOSED BUT DISSIDENT ELEMENTS TOOK

OVER PODIUM, DECLARED UNION LEADERSHIP VACANT, AND ESTABLISHED "COORDINATING COMMITTEE" TO ORGANIZE NEW ELECTIONS. DISSIDENTS WERE PREVENTED FROM TAKING OVER UNION HEADQUARTERS BY GROUP OF 100 WORKERS LOYAL TO ELECTED LEADERSHIP.

3. TWO-DAY CONFRONTATION IN FRONT OF UNION QUARTERS REACHED STAND-OFF WHILE BOTH SIDES APPEALED TO MINISTRY OF LABOR AND ISSUED PRESS STATEMENTS. MINISTRY, IN DECISION WORTHY OF KING SOLOMON, REAFFIRMED ELECTED LEADERSHIP BUT DIRECTED THAT NEW ELECTIONS BE HELD WITHIN ONE MONTH. MINISTRY OFFICIAL INVOLVED IN NEGOTIATIONS TOLD EMBASSY'S LABATT THAT DISPUTE ALMOST ENTIRELY POLITICAL IN NATURE.

4. COMMENT: CHEMICAL UNION ELECTIONS WILL BE INDICATIVE OF PCP STRENGTH AMONG RANK AND FILE WORKERS. AS IS USUAL IN SUCH INCIDENTS, ONLY A SMALL PERCENTAGE OF THE CHEMICAL WORKERS' CLAIMED 30,000 MEMBERSHIP ACTIVELY PARTICIPATED IN CONFRONTATION. RECENT UNION ELECTIONS IN WHICH PCP/NON-COMMUNIST ISSUE MUCH LESS CLEARLY DEFINED HAVE DRAWN VOTES OF UP TO 80 PERCENT OF UNION MEMBERSHIP AND IT IS EXPECTED THAT THERE WILL BE HEAVY TURN-OUT OF CHEMICAL WORKERS.

5. THE ELECTIONS WILL ALSO BE AN INDICATION OF THE EXTENT TO WHICH THE MINISTRY OF LABOR WILL INTERVENE TO INFLUENCE THE OUTCOME OF INTERNAL UNION POLITICS. DURING A PREVIOUS, LESS IDEOLOGICAL DISPUTE AMONG PLASTIC WORKERS, THE MINISTER OF LABOR CALLED UPON THE MILITARY TO SUPERVISE UNION ELECTIONS, WHICH IT DID IN IMPARTIAL AND ORDERLY MANNER. NON-PARTISAN HANDLING OF THIS MATTER BY THE MINISTRY WOULD BE HOPEFUL SIGN FOR THE NATIONWIDE ROUND OF UNION ELECTIONS WHICH MUST BE HELD IN ACCORDANCE WITH TERMS OF FORTHCOMING LABOR LAW.  
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